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DETROIT

2 accused in fraud, killing of 2-year-old

They tried to barbecue body, prosecutors say

BY BEN SCHMITT • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • March 20, 2008

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The parents of a 2-year-old boy whose remains were found in the ceiling a Detroit home were charged Wednesday with first-degree murder, though prosecutors said they still don't know how Deuntay Miller died.

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They do know, however, that Deuntay suffered from severe malnutrition and a slew of broken bones before his parents allegedly tried to cremate him in a barbecue grill, prosecutors said.

Even more unsettling are the allegations of welfare fraud that stem from the parents collecting welfare and food stamps in the child's name after he died, prosecutors said.

Nickella Reid, 24, and Joseph Miller, 28, both of Detroit, told police that they tried to cremate Deuntay to avoid funeral costs.

The case broke when Reid and her mother took Deuntay's brother, Nicholas Miller, then 1, to Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit on Nov. 11 for second- and third-degree burns. Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy said 35% of Nicholas' body had been burned, and he is still recovering.

Hospital authorities notified state child protective services at the time. A subsequent investigation led police to learn that Deuntay was missing.

On Nov. 22, Detroit police found Deuntay's charred remains sealed in the ceiling of a home on the 15600 block of Lappin, where Joseph Miller's sister lived.

Reid and Miller have been in jail since November on child abuse charges stemming from Nicholas' burns. They were arraigned on the new charges Wednesday in 36th District Court. "Those of us here were truly shocked by the facts and the circumstances of this case," Worthy said during a news conference.

Additionally, Worthy charged Reid's mother, Doretha Lippett, 51, of Detroit with two counts of welfare fraud for her role in allegedly assisting her daughter in collecting the money. She will turn herself in this week, Worthy said.

"She was a part and parcel ... in helping dissuade the authorities when they were asking questions about where was this missing child," Worthy said. "She was, according to the evidence, responsible for helping" another boy pose as the missing boy.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Jerry Dorsey, who heads the child and family abuse unit, said Deuntay had been dead for a period ranging from nine months to a year when police found his remains.

"It is very difficult to think of an innocent child suffering so profoundly during his two years on Earth," Worthy said.

Contact **BEN SCHMITT** at 313-223-4296 or bschmitt@freepress.com.

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Thursday, March 20, 2008

Couple charged with son's murder

Prosecutor said parents tried to cremate the body of 2-year-old boy on the family's barbecue grill.

Candice Williams / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Two parents pleaded not guilty Wednesday to murder charges in the death of their 2-year-old son, whose charred remains were found in a basement ceiling of a home on the city's east side.

Joseph Miller, 28, and Nickella Reid, 23, stood together as they were arraigned by video in 36th District Court on charges of felony murder, involuntary manslaughter, first-degree child abuse, mutilation of a body and welfare fraud over \$500. Reid was also charged with another count of welfare fraud over \$500 and two counts of failure to inform.

A preliminary exam has been scheduled for March 31. Meanwhile, the couple will remain in the Wayne County Jail, where they were being held on a pending child abuse case.

As Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy announced the charges earlier in the day, she said Miller and Reid are "truly an unfit family to raise children."

In November, police recovered Deuntay Reid's skeletal remains in the ceiling of a home in the 2100 block of Dickerson. Police said Reid told them that she and Miller were unable to afford a funeral, so Miller tried unsuccessfully to cremate him in a barbecue grill. Miller then hid the boy's remains in the ceiling of the home where his sister used to live.

"I think they thought they were going to get away with it," said Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Jerry Dorsey IV. "Deuntay had been dead for over a year."

Forensic examination of Deuntay's remains revealed that the child suffered from malnutrition, unknown disease and abuse, Worthy said.

Reid's mother, Doretha Lippert, 51, also is expected to be charged with two counts of welfare fraud over \$500 for allegedly helping her daughter to collect benefits for Deuntay after his death.

Lippert also has been accused of helping her daughter thwart suspicion over Deuntay's death by replacing him with a cousin during certain social functions, Worthy said. She added that her office still is investigating why his death went unsuspected for so long.

Police began to unravel the story of Deuntay's death after one of the couple's children, an 18-month-old son, was hospitalized in November with burns over one-third of his body. He is still in the hospital, Worthy said. The couple had five children in total, including Deuntay. The other three children are in foster care.

If convicted of the murder charge, the couple could face a maximum penalty of life in prison without parole.

You can reach Candice Williams at (517) 552-5504 or cwilliams@detnews.com.

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THE DAILY Reporter

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MSP investigating Tuesday death of five-month-old

[Print Page](#)

By Don Reid-Staff Writer

COLDWATER — Michigan State Police from the Coldwater Post #59 are looking into the sudden Tuesday afternoon death of a five-month-old baby girl, who was at a Coldwater Township daycare facility.

The caregiver called for medical help around 3:20 p.m. Tuesday when she found the child unresponsive. The child was pronounced dead the Emergency Room of Community Health Center of Branch County after attempts were made to revive the little girl.

An autopsy was performed Wednesday morning in Grand Rapids but the results were not available.

The Department of Human Services also conducted an investigation since the facility is licensed to provide child care.

LifeCare Ambulance and the Coldwater Fire Department also responded with police.

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Autopsy: Polish solvent or rubbing alcohol killed tot

Thursday, March 20, 2008

By Nate Reens

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Isopropyl alcohol or nail-polish remover that 2-year-old Keenan Marshall ingested slowly ate away at his brain, killing the toddler at a care provider's home, a medical examiner has ruled.

Keenan's sudden death one month ago was explained Wednesday as an accident that resulted from the consumption of either of the chemicals in a bathroom at Melissa VanFossen's Plainfield Township home.

The boy and his 6-year-old brother, Zach, were being watched by VanFossen while their parents, Mike and Kris Marshall, vacationed in Mexico.

Toxicology reports found acetone, the active product in nail-polish remover and a byproduct of deteriorating rubbing alcohol, to be present in the boy's urine and eye fluid, forensic pathologist Dr. David Start said.

"Over two days the body is continuing to break down," Start said of the brain damage. "It would have been really difficult to detect. He didn't appear to have neurological problems and, given the season and the symptoms, it probably looked like a flu bug."

Keenan fell ill Feb. 18, three days after arriving at VanFossen's home day care. VanFossen took him to his doctor on Feb. 20 and was told to keep the boy hydrated after he vomited and felt weak. The next morning, she found him dead.

The state agency that regulates day care centers later suspended her license and moved for its revocation based on multiple alleged violations of policy.

The Kent County Sheriff's Department has ruled the death accidental. There were no signs of trauma, authorities said.

Bob VanderLaan, an attorney representing VanFossen, said Wednesday he had not seen the complete autopsy report, but said his client cared for Keenan the way anyone would have.

"I will say anyone who jumps to any conclusions in this matter is making a serious mistake," VanderLaan said. "This is a woman who took a baby to the baby's pediatrician and followed all of the advice given to her.

"That was exactly the plan that the VanFossens and the child's parents had arranged and Mrs. VanFossen followed that plan."

Kris Marshall declined Wednesday to comment on her son's death.

It's unclear when Keenan consumed the chemical, but Start points to either Feb. 18 or 19. The tests could not determine how much acetone or rubbing alcohol the boy swallowed, but 240 milliliters, or 8 ounces, can be fatal for an adult, Start said.

"Here we have a 31-pound boy, and certainly it could have been much less," he said.

State records obtained through the Freedom of Information Act show investigators found an empty bottle of rubbing alcohol in the trash in a bathroom that Melissa VanFossen bathed the boy in on Feb. 18. She

earlier had put Keenan there for a "timeout" that day, a state investigator wrote. That bathroom also had nail-polish remover in a drawer, records show.

Keenan was put in timeout for "melting down," which VanFossen attributed to missing his parents, records showed. The boy's older brother saw no inappropriate behavior by the caregiver.

VanFossen could not explain why the alcohol bottle was empty and in the trash, according to the documents. She said no one in the home saw Keenan ingest either of the liquids.

Send e-mail to the author: nreens@grpress.com

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Oceana's Herald-Journal

Posted: 3-19-2008

Syringe needle injuries prompt child abuse trial

A Grand Rapids man was scheduled to go on trial Wednesday for allegedly puncturing a 2-year-old boy in the legs, feet and penis with a syringe needle while the man was being treated for kidney stones at Hackley Lakeshore Hospital in Shelby last year.

Michael Aranjo, 30, of 1507 Alpine, Grand Rapids, is charged with one count of second degree child abuse, one count third degree child abuse and as a habitual offender. The trial was scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday this week.



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Published March 20, 2008



(Photo by Matthew Dae Smith/For the Lansing State Journal)

Showing support: Mary Wood, the wife of convicted child molester Robin Wood, speaks outside Circuit Court Judge Paula Manderfield's courtroom Wednesday morning. Moments before, Robin Wood was sentenced to 10 to 30 years in prison. "We will appeal this," Mary Wood said. She stood by her husband's plea of innocence throughout the trial. Above, Robin Wood waves to his wife and supporters before he is sentenced.

What's next

The family of Robin Wood, who was sentenced Wednesday to 10 to 30 years in prison for sexually assaulting two children, said he will appeal the conviction.

Electronic monitoring

As part of the sentence, Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield said Robin Wood, if paroled or released from prison, would be subject to lifetime electronic monitoring and will be listed on the state sex offender registry.

Wood gets 10-30 years; convicted child molester plans to appeal

Sentencing sparks emotion on both sides

Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

A packed courtroom was divided Wednesday.

On one side, about 40 supporters of 60-year-old Robin Wood, who was sentenced to 10 to 30 years

in prison for sexually assaulting two girls at his wife's home day care. They say he is innocent.

On the other, about two dozen friends and families of the victims, now 5 and 11 years old.

"He's a sick and disgusting man who took the trust and innocence of young children," said an aunt of one of the victims as she read a letter during the hearing in Ingham County Circuit Court Judge Paula Manderfield's courtroom. Her name is not being released in order to protect the identity of the victim.

The woman occasionally had to stop reading to compose herself.

In January, a jury found Wood guilty of four counts of criminal sexual conduct involving the girls. Two of the counts were first-degree criminal sexual conduct, which carried a maximum punishment of life in prison. The charges involved penetration with fingers. Wood said he would occasionally hug the children or rub their backs, but he never touched the children for sexual reasons.

As the aunt as well as the mother of the victims read letters asking for the maximum sentence, Wood stood stone-faced, looking in the direction of the victims' families.

"I still maintain the fact that I am innocent of this crime," said Wood, who had smiled and waved to family and supporters as he walked into the courtroom, his wrists shackled to a belt around his waist.

Wood's family and his attorney said he will appeal the conviction.

The mother of the 5-year-old victim said Wood had violated her daughter physically, emotionally and spiritually.

"How do you explain to your child that someone thought it was OK to touch them sexually when they were little?" she read from her letter.

After the hearing, the Lansing woman was visibly elated that the sentence could keep Wood in prison for life.

"We're just really pleased it's over," she said.

A General Motors Corp. retiree, Robin Wood testified at trial that he began assisting in caring for children after his 2003 retirement.

Police closed Mary's Quality Daycare on Jan. 19, 2007. A parent had told the state Department of Human Services about possible crimes.

Mary Wood lost her license. Her husband was charged in February.

After Wednesday's hearing, the Woods' family and friends - including many parents whose children had attended the day care - displayed a vocal and organized show of support outside the courtroom. They held signs saying, "Free Robin Wood," as they chanted the same phrase.

Dozens had tried to hold up the signs in court, but Manderfield would not allow it.

They made clear that they stand behind Wood; many submitted letters to Manderfield on behalf of Wood.

"I couldn't wait to have my daughter so she could go to that day care," said Alyssa Hernandez, 18, who began attending the day care when she was 4 years old.

"He was everything - a father figure, a grandpa to me," she added.

"I believe this is all a big misunderstanding," said Lynne Lipka, who sent her two girls and two boys to the day care from about 1992 to 2000.

The 41-year-old Lansing woman said that after charges against Wood were announced, she asked all her children if Wood had ever done anything inappropriate to them or even seen inappropriate behavior. Her children typically would see him at overnights, pizza parties and other events.

All four "adamantly said, no, not Robin," Lipka said.

Mary Wood said she would never support a child predator.

"If I would have thought he was guilty, I would have been on the other side of the courtroom," she said.

Yolanda Fattoum of Lansing, who worked at the day care nearly five years until it was closed down, said: "Mary and Robin are the only people I would trust to watch my children."

When Fattoum's 2 1/2 year old son saw Robin on the news, he cried, said Fattoum, 24.

"He loves Robin so much," she said.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

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Teacher testifies in Perry case OAKLAND COUNTY

Boy's mom cited like incident, she says

BY L.L. BRASIER and JOHN WISELY • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS • March 20, 2008

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The mother of a kindergarten boy who has accused his teacher of rape confided to another teacher that something similar happened to her son in Chicago, according to testimony in Oakland County Circuit Court on Wednesday.

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"The mother told me that she was sad because that had happened to him before," said Lynn Duncan, a kindergarten teacher at Key Elementary School in Oak Park, where former teacher James Perry is accused of pulling two boys from a lunch line and raping them in a special-education classroom.

The mother previously denied making the statement, and Duncan testified that the mother didn't specify what happened in Chicago. Duncan said on the stand that she concluded it was a reference to a sexual assault because that's what they were discussing at the time.

Duncan's statement, which prosecutors tried to block under rape shield laws, is important to the defense because they said the boy's history and knowledge of sexual matters -- he has made statements about "gay stuff" and has admitted to some knowledge of oral sex -- prompted him to make the allegations.

It's the second trial for Perry, accused of raping the two boys, then ages 4 and 5, in October 2005. A jury convicted him in September 2006, but trial Judge Denise Langford Morris threw out that ruling, arguing that evidence discovered after the trial would have made letting the conviction stand a miscarriage of justice.

In other testimony, the teacher in the special-education classroom where the boys say the assaults happened testified that the room was occupied throughout the school day and that an assault could not have happened there.

"We ate in that room every day. The routine never varied," said Clara Geary, a special-education teacher.

Defense attorneys also presented a former county jail inmate who contradicted what another inmate said Tuesday.

Michael Bray shared a cell with Perry in late 2005 and 2006. Bray was in jail after pleading no contest to one count of criminal sexual conduct in the fourth degree and has been released.

Bray disputed inmate Harlan Ingle's testimony that Ingle and Perry were friends in jail and also disputed that Perry often confided in Ingle, including some of the details of the alleged assaults on the two boys.

"He's a liar," Bray said of Ingle.

Ingle also testified Tuesday that Perry had told him videotapes depicting children playing in the neighborhood were removed by Perry's father

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Teacher testifies in Perry case

from the basement of Perry's home before police arrived.

But a defense witness, John Gifford, a private investigator who visited Perry's home, countered that the home doesn't have a basement.

Contact **L.L. BRASIER** at 248-858-2262 or brasier@freepress.com.

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Interrogation abuses justice, and a child

March 20, 2008

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There are good reasons why rules are in place about how to question kids in sex abuse cases.

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There do not appear to be any good reasons why a West Bloomfield Township police detective subjected a 13-year-old boy to an hour-long ordeal in an interrogation room, using falsehoods in an attempt to get him to incriminate his own father.

This was shameful conduct, cruel to a child, devastating to a family, and potentially very costly to the township. Det. Joseph Brousseau -- who repeatedly accused the boy of lying and claimed police had video evidence that did not, in fact, exist -- appeared to violate just about every aspect of the protocol for interviewing children.

As detailed this week by Free Press columnist Brian Dickerson, the 13-year-old, who has been treated for a form of autism called Asperger Syndrome, was questioned last Dec. 4 as authorities tried to make charges stick against his father, jailed for allegedly abusing his 14-year-old daughter, who also has autism. The father was released last month after 80 days. The children's mother spent that time wearing an electronic tether, and the children were in separate foster homes.

Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca dropped the case last week, unable to substantiate allegations supposedly made by the daughter, who typed with the aid of a paraprofessional in what is known as "facilitated communication."

This is simply a family's worst nightmare that came tragically true. They had their lives invaded by overzealous cops and prosecutors who drew conclusions first and tried to make their case later.

"Reprehensible" is how one legal expert described the interrogation that left the boy sobbing and doubting what he knew of his own father. Another term that comes to mind from watching excerpts at www.freep.com is "child abuse."

Township officials tell Dickerson they've asked police to review their handling of the case. That doesn't sound nearly as aggressive as the police were in trying to build it.

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[Alcona to hire part-time employee to deal with high-risk families](#)

Patty Ramus

POSTED: March 19, 2008

The Alcona County Board of Commissioners voted Wednesday to support the hiring of a part-time employee who will work with high-risk families.

The position will be hired and supervised by the Family Division of the 23rd Circuit Court. The position is one of the contracts with Department of Human Services, which allocates Strong Families/Safe Children funding.

Juvenile Officer Tamyra Ranger said Alcona County recently was rewarded a \$50,000 allocation of Strong Families/Safe Children funding. The money will cover a family specialist over a 2 1/2 year period. The worker would be working with families having child protective services investigations with a focus on improving parenting skills.

"It's a really specific position that we can't deviate from," said Probate Judge Laura Frawley.

Frawley said there's a chance the Department of Human Services could cut this grant in the future. If this happens the position would be terminated.

In an update on other programs, Ranger said a separate allocation of Strong Families Safe Children money also will provide funding toward the 12 sessions of fair market rate counseling services that convicted youths qualify for.

Ranger said the basic \$15,000 DHS grant currently is being used to support the cost of three behavioral health consultants through the Alcona Health Center. These consultants are in Glennie Elementary School and Alcona Middle School providing prevention services to identified at-risk youth.

The remainder of the grant money is being used to supplement the night surveillance officer position.

In other business:

? Tim Gauthier, Caledonia Township supervisor, approached the board regarding the settlement of township's tax rolls with the county. The township has not been able to settle its rolls because the manner in which the information is recorded or changed has been questioned.

Gauthier said the information for the tax rolls is generated by a computer software which has not been certified by the state. The State Tax Commission will meet in April and the forms can be submitted to apply for the software to be certified by the commission.

Gauthier said the county can fill out a blanket form which would apply for certification for all the townships who wish to participate or the township can fill out its own separate application. Chair Kevin Boyat and Treasurer Anna McCoy said they would discuss the issue further with Gauthier.

? The board adopted a resolution supporting the dissolution of the Wurtsmith Development Commission.

Administrator Gary Kellan said the commission will formally dissolve on March 31. Since the commission was developed 15 years ago, projects such as improvements to the former base's sewer lines and the demolishing of 440 housing units have been accomplished. A total of 742 houses have been resold and

occupied and 57 Wurtsmith buildings are occupied by 46 businesses.

? The board supported the Alcona County Parks and Recreation Commission recommendation to change the location of a trail head for an off-road vehicle trail from Walker Road to another location. Commissioner Richard Simmons said the board will let the recreation commission determine the new location.

? 911 Director Dean Parker said the Michigan Public Service Commission voted on March 11 to adjust 49 counties' applications for county-rendered surcharges on all communications devices capable of contacting 911. Alcona, Alpena and Presque Isle counties were included in these 49 counties.

Alcona applied to the Emergency Telephone Services Committee to collect a \$3 surcharge beginning July 1. The ETSC approved the application and recommended the MPSC to approve the application. The MPSC's decision currently has Alcona collecting a \$2.10 surcharge which will equal about a \$100,000 loss in revenues for the 911 Authority Board, Parker said.

Parker said Alcona County plans to appeal the decision and will have to hire a private attorney to do this. He's been checking with other counties to see if they plan to appeal, he added.

Patty Ramus can be reached via e-mail at pramus@thealpenanews.com or by phone at 358-5687.

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SHELBY TOWNSHIP

Man kills his wife, then shoots himself, cops say

BY ERIC D. LAWRENCE • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • March 20, 2008

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A man shot and killed his wife before fatally shooting himself in a vehicle behind a Shelby Township church Wednesday night, township Police Chief Robert Leman said.

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The man, 47, was taken to Henry Ford Macomb Hospital in Clinton Township with a gunshot wound to the head, Leman said.

The man's wife, 38, died at the scene. Leman said the reason for the shootings was unclear, although police said the couple had a history of domestic violence.

He did not elaborate and declined to identify the couple but said they were township residents.

The shootings happened just before 8 p.m. in a parking lot at St. Therese of Lisieux Catholic Church, on Schoenherr Road north of 21 Mile, Leman said.

Police learned of the shootings after receiving a phone call from a family member.

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Author speaks of hope, optimism during CWIT fundraiser

Wed, Mar 19, 2008

BY KYLE MORONEY kmoroney@grandhaventribune.com

When peering out a taxi cab window in New York City, celebrity journalist Jeannette Walls saw a homeless woman rummaging for food in a dumpster. She looked a bit closer and realized it was her mother.



Walls, who then lived on the lavish Park Avenue, was embarrassed and terrified of what people might think of her if they knew her mother was living under the George Washington bridge.

"I thought if people knew my story, I would be fired from my job and I would lose my friends," Walls said. "... I was terrified what people would think of me."

She confronted her mother a couple of days later and her mother told her to tell the truth.

That story opens Walls' memoir, the New York Times bestseller "The Glass Castle," which chronicles her poverty-stricken childhood with an often drunken father and an "eccentric" mother who often neglected Walls and her three siblings.

Walls was the guest speaker for the Center for Women in Transition's third annual Making a Difference fundraising event, held Tuesday at Covenant Life Church in downtown Grand Haven. Between 325 and 350 attendees were treated to a "Taste of Grand Haven" luncheon — which included food donated from local eateries, raffles and a book signing by Walls.

After writing "The Glass Castle," Walls said she realized that she had underestimated people.

"I didn't set out to help somebody," she said. "... But if I can make one person understand what it is like to be poor, then whatever embarrassment and shame I'm going to go through will be worth it. Hopefully, someone like me is going to read this book and this will give them a glimmer of hope."

Walls told the sold-out crowd that she will never take for granted the fact that she can shop at the grocery store or flush the toilet in her Virginia home. Although she has escaped poverty, Walls knows what it is like to have to rummage garbage cans for leftovers, live in a cardboard box, or not have heat or plumbing.

"I truly believe that things are either blessings or curses — it's up to us on what we choose to focus on," Walls said. "I will never take food for granted — that is a blessing to me. I will never take anything for granted."

Walls inspired the crowd to dream, face their fears and challenges, and that "the truth will set you free."

"We can't change the past, but we can change how we feel about it and we can change the future," she said.

While Walls' childhood peers looked down upon her drab clothing and often unclean skin, the harrowing experience taught her a few things, she said.

"(My mother) gave me the sense of optimism and my dad gave me the sense of dream," Walls said, adding that her father told her and her siblings that he would someday build a mansion — they called it "the glass castle."

"The glass castle was like a drunken promise, but it was also hope and a dream for the future," Walls explained. "Moving around, sleeping in cardboard boxes and rummaging for food, I dreamt that one day I'm going to have a nice place to live.

"You don't know what you would be like if your circumstances were different," she added. "It's about getting beyond the barriers and understanding how much we have in common."

When Walls was 3, she burned herself while trying to make hot dogs and was required to have skin graft surgery. Years later, when she married her husband, she felt embarrassed by the scars left behind by the burns. "Scars are signs that you've survived," she said her husband replied.

"We've all got our textures — whether it's a silky texture or a bit rougher," Walls said. "Whatever your texture, don't let anyone think you're less of a person."

Walls explained the importance of building up self-esteem, especially in a child.

"Kids can tell if you look down at them," she said, adding that "it makes all the difference" when a child is praised as the "good kid" or the "bad kid."



Lisa Luckey, chairwoman for Making a Difference, said she was pleased with the event.

"We sold out," she said. "We were very pleased and honored to have Jeannette Walls here as our guest speaker. She's inspirational and I think the Grand Haven community needed to hear her story and understand domestic violence and how it relates to the Center for Women in Transition."

The event's committee members set a goal of raising \$10,000, which will go toward the programs and services the Center for Women in Transition provides in the Tri-Cities. While the final numbers won't be in until later this week, Luckey believes that they exceeded their goal.

"I knew it would be good, but I think (Walls) exceeded our expectations," Center for Women in Transition Development Director Mary Louise Avery said. "We're all here because we care about women who are going through rough times. And the talk about courage and bravery — and how many women in this room actually could walk up to her and say, 'I've experienced something of what you've experienced' — so we met our mission."

"The Glass Castle" is in the making for a movie by Brad Pitt's production company, Walls said. While she knows who will play her in the movie, Walls would not disclose that information.

"I'm a little nervous, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed," she said.



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03/19/2008

Our View: A good plan

Michigan is in line to become the first state in the nation to issue food stamps twice a month.

The Senate has given the bill its nod. A similar bill is pending as House Bill 4923 in the state House while food stamp recipients are surveyed to find out how the change would affect them.

The state also is seeking a waiver from the federal government, seeking to get around a provision in the 2007 Farm Bill that prohibits states from distributing federal food assistance funds more than once monthly.

We believe issuing food assistance payments twice a month is a good idea. Ideally, it would help people extend their buying power well into the month, allowing them to buy fresh produce and meat at least twice a month.

Retailers say the current once-a-month checks are spent early in the month and usually all at once, causing them problems with staffing, cash flow and inventory, the Associated Press has reported.

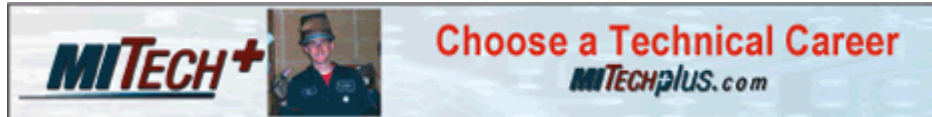
The retailers say the twice-a-month allotment would help them keep fresher foods in the store. It also would help families move toward a healthier lifestyle.

The Department of Human Services has resisted the change, saying it would burden the department and cost more than a plan they are proposing -- spreading payments over 20 days instead of having checks all go out the same day.

But the 20-day plan, while helping retailers, does nothing to help people keep fresher produce, meats and dairy in the house. It does nothing to encourage people to live a healthier lifestyle.

The twice-a-month plan makes sense to us, and if the DHS is about providing service, then it should make sense to them, too.

We want to know what you think! Please feel free to use the "post a comment" link below. Note that the terms and conditions require both first and last name.



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Updated: 3/20/2008 9:53:23 AM

Michigan reports one of the biggest increases in jobless claims

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of newly laid off workers filing for unemployment benefits rose last week to the highest level in nearly two months, providing more evidence that the weak economy is having an adverse impact on the labor market.

The Labor Department said Thursday that applications for jobless benefits totaled 378,000 last week. That was an increase of 22,000 from the previous week and was a far bigger jump than had been expected.

The four-week average for new claims rose to 365,250, which was the highest level since a flood of claims caused by the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes.

The current economic slowdown, which many economists believe has already turned into a full-blown recession, is starting to show up in the labor market in terms of higher layoffs and weaker hiring numbers.

The total number of payroll jobs fell by 63,000 in February, an even bigger decline than the drop of 22,000 jobs in January, which had been the first monthly decline since mid-2003.

“We have no doubt that the trend in claims is upwards and is approaching the levels seen in the earlier stage of the recession in 2001,” said Ian Shepherdson, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics.

Part of the increase in benefit applications in recent weeks occurred because of a three-week strike at a major parts supplier to General Motors Corp., which has forced GM to close all or part of 28 plants, affecting more than 37,000 hourly workers.

The number of unemployed workers who are receiving benefits totaled 2.865 million, the largest amount since late August 2004.

The Federal Reserve this week cut a key interest rate by a sizable three-quarters of 1 percent, wrapping up the most aggressive two months of credit easing by the central bank in a quarter century.

The Fed has also greatly expanded its loans to cash-strapped banks and used a Depression-era process to supply money to Wall Street investment houses in an effort to keep a serious credit squeeze from pushing the country into a deep recession.

For the week ending March 8, 28 states and territories reported an increase in jobless claims and 25 reported declines. The states with the biggest

increases were California, up by 3,755; Michigan, up by 2,236, and Indiana, with an increase of 2,158. The layoffs in Michigan and Indiana were attributed in part to higher layoffs in the auto industry.

The states with the biggest drop in claims two weeks ago were New York, down by 13,504, and Connecticut, which fell by 2,228.

[Print Page](#)

Promise of right to counsel for poor remains an illusion in Michigan 45 years after Gideon v. Wainwright

Wednesday, March 19, 2008 10:03 AM EDT

DETROIT - The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan Tuesday marked the 45th anniversary of the historic Supreme Court decision in Gideon v. Wainwright by calling on Michigan to provide adequate legal defense for the poor.

The landmark 1963 decision held that the Constitution guarantees every person charged with a felony the right to an attorney even if he or she cannot afford one.

Subsequent cases have refined the ruling to extend to misdemeanor cases and to require "competent" representation.

Unfortunately, the promise of Gideon remains largely unfulfilled in Michigan.

"Every day, people who cannot afford private counsel are being denied justice in Michigan," said Kary L. Moss, ACLU of Michigan executive director.

"Michigan must step up on this anniversary and take charge of public defense to insure that all people in Michigan receive equal justice."

In February 2007, the ACLU of Michigan, along with coalition partners the National ACLU and the law firm of Cravath, Swaine and Moore filed a lawsuit against the State of Michigan and Gov. Jennifer Granholm for failing to fulfill their constitutional obligation to provide adequate defense services to those who cannot afford private counsel.

The lawsuit filed in Ingham County charges that Michigan has long abdicated its constitutional duty to insure that citizens accused of crimes receive timely, qualified, appropriately-resourced lawyers for their defense.

For more than 30 years, state and local experts have reported on the deficiencies of Michigan's public defense system, yet the state has done nothing to improve the situation.

Recently, an American Bar Association report on the state of public defense across the country repeatedly cited Michigan for failing to meet the ABA Ten Principles, which are considered the fundamental criteria a system must meet to provide effective public defense.

The lawsuit focuses on three counties - Muskegon County, Berrien County and Genesee County, where the problems associated with public defense are obvious.

In Berrien County for example, the prosecution receives almost four times the funding of the public defense system.

Because of these and other inequities, public defenders are crippled by overwhelming caseloads that impede them from meeting with their clients, investigating cases, filing appropriate pre-trial motions and preparing properly for court appearances.

In May, an Ingham County Circuit Court judge denied the state's request to dismiss the case.

Michigan Report

March 19, 2008

HOUSE PASSES FIRST BUDGETS

HUMAN SERVICES: The Department of Human Services 2008-09 fiscal year budget ([HB 5814](#)) totals \$4.6 billion (\$1.3 billion in general funds). The committee budget is \$37 million, or 0.8 percent, above current year funding levels, with general fund spending up \$16.8 million, or 1.3 percent. However, the budget is below the governor's recommendation by \$44 million gross, \$51.4 million in general funds (the subcommittee budget spends more in restricted and federal funds, but less in local dollars). The budget would cut 60 staff positions in juvenile justice facilities (30 from the state's medium security facility, 20 from central staff in the Bureau of Juvenile Justice and 10 from the Flint House community juvenile justice center, which the department has already planned to close). The action would net savings to the general fund totaling \$4.1 million, with gross savings of \$6.2 million.

DHS Subcommittee Chair [Rep. Dudley Spade](#) (D-Franklin Twp.) said those cuts are part of the department's efforts to implement staffing reforms as enrollments decline, as well as his own opinion that the central staffing levels haven't been justified.

Savings from those staffing reductions will go toward hiring employees in other parts of the DHS budget. That would include 64 new DHS field staff, three new staff in the interstate compact unit (which oversees interstate child placements) and five new staff in the foster care and adoption contract monitoring division. Hiring those new people will cost \$5.4 million gross, \$3.2 million of that in general funds.

The budget also includes the hiring of 12 new licensing staff to the bureau that handles background checks, which is higher than the governor's recommended five new employees. Those hirings will cost \$1.3 million gross, \$1 million in general funds.

The budget also includes a Family Independence Program benefit increase of \$3 per person, per month, so an average family of three would receive \$498 each month. That was one of the governor's budget recommendations.

Many low-income families received a benefit increase in 2006 due to a revision in payment standard tables, but this would be the first general increase in the program since 1990. Increasing the cash assistance offered would add \$7.5 million in general fund costs to the program, making total spending each \$374 million.

People receiving state disability assistance benefits would also see more funding under the governor's and House's budget, which adds \$5 per person, per month, to the program at a cost of \$1.3 million (\$1 million general fund). Those individuals would receive \$269 a month, which is a 2 percent increase from current year funding levels.

The governor's and House committee budgets differ in their anticipated caseloads for FIP and day care services, with the latter expecting lower assistance needed (3,300 less FIP cases, 4,000 less day care). The House budget therefore saves \$14.9 million gross, \$13.4 million GF, for FIP, and \$29.7 million gross and GF for day care.

The caseload estimations come from the House Fiscal Agency and Mr. Spade said, "We felt last year and I feel this year these are based on solid projections."

The budget builds off of the governor's recommendation to increase the FIP children's clothing allowance from \$43 per child to \$75, with the House recommendation of \$100 per child at a cost of \$7 million in general funds. Day care providers would also see a boost under both the governor's and House's budgets. But the House provides a \$15 million appropriation to be applied across-the-board to all providers, while the governor included some funding for day care program administration. Licensed day care providers would get additional state support - a \$5.6 million or 4 percent - in an effort to spur more facilities into getting licensed.

Both the governor and House committee budget anticipate a \$5.3 million general fund savings from a change in federal law regarding FIP child support pass-through. Savings of \$4.3 million in general funds is also expected in both budgets because of a change in state policy regarding retroactive Supplemental Security Income payments with the state retaining some of the payments as reimbursement for previous FIP support.

Both budgets also redirect \$7.3 million that paid for FIP clients under Michigan Rehabilitation Services. That money instead would cover 63 new FIP caseworkers and 20 related administrative positions at a general fund savings of \$1.4 million.

The House committee budget departs from the executive recommendation by providing more money for indigent burials (\$1.4 million GF) and \$3

million (all GF) for facility improvements at Maxey Training School and property development at Adrian Training School.

The House committee version also differs from the governor's in terms of Title IV-E funding assumptions, which were also built into the current year budget. The governor's budget eliminates anticipation of all of those fiscal savings, while the House version partially restores those savings to \$3.2 million in general funds, \$8.6 million gross, compared to the current fiscal year.

The budget from the committee also incorporates \$1 million (\$200,000 GF) in additional spending for a program that assists older youth who are transferring out of the child welfare system.

During a subcommittee meeting earlier in the day, [Rep. Darwin Booher](#) (R-Evart) said that while some audits of DHS have shown lack of oversight for where some of the public assistance is going, the budget "is just putting money on top of money (and) not doing a very good job at managing dollars."

[Rep. Michael Lahti](#) (D-Hancock) said the subcommittee has done its job at bringing those issues up and moving toward fixes to those problems. And Mr. Spade added that while the department does have oversight matters to address, that has to be balanced with the fact that DHS clients are the state's most vulnerable individuals.



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Russians learn about local social services work

Delegation plans to take ideas back to homeland programs

Thursday, March 20, 2008

BY LIZ COBBS

Children and teenagers in Russia and America face similar challenges and social workers, educators and leaders of nonprofit agencies working with youth have to find answers.

A 10-member delegation from Russia met with social workers from Eastern Michigan University and Willow Run Community Schools Tuesday for a dialogue on issues young people face in each country.

The group, made up of directors and managers of social service and government agencies working with youth, is visiting the country for 10 days under the Open World Program, a nonpartisan initiative of the U.S. Congress.

The congressional exchange program brings in leaders from Russia and other Eurasian countries to work with their counterparts in America and learn how the U.S. private and nonprofit sectors help meet social and civic needs.

EMU's School of Social Work is hosting the delegation this week, said Mark Ragg, associate professor in EMU's School of Social Work.

Sharing how the local social work system works has been beneficial, said Trubina Galina Anatolevna, manager of a regional rehabilitation center for children and teens with disabilities in Volgograd, located in the southern part of Russia.

"We see the differences here," Anatolevna said through interpreter Olga Safronova, a facilitator with the Open World Program. "Social work and education is combined (in the local schools) and in our system, they are separate. This has been informative and educational."

Olga Vitalievna, who heads a nonprofit youth organization in the Udmurtskaya Republic, in the eastern part of Russia, said she learned a lot from a session at EMU on fundraising efforts of local social service nonprofits.

"I think we will use some of those ideas," Vitalievna said through Safronova.

Alexey Ju Zavrachin said in addition to social work, he's also learning about "everyday urban life" in America.

"My opinion of the United States has changed dramatically," he said through the interpreter. "My opinion of America has been good, but Americans have exceeded my expectations."

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